HOW JIM STICKINGS "DID" THE RAILWAY COMPANY

JOSHUA BOUNCEBY was a director of the London and Suburban Railway Company. In appearance he was a big, florid man, with several chins, a capacious girth of waistcoat and a general air of solid prosperity. In disposition he was suspicious, meddlesome and fussy. He seldom believed or trusted anybody. Moreover he was imbued with the idea that he knew everybody else's work better than they themselves did, and was perpetually poking his nose thereinto, and explaining in a very cocksure way how this or that ought to be done.

He was thus, as may well be imagined, a considerable nuisance to his fellow directors, a perfect curse to the secretary and the standing bete noir of all the company's employes, from the chief engineer of the line to the smallest boy in a blue linen jacket who had recently been engaged to dust out the company's booking offices at their most insignificant station.

To make matters worse Joshua Bounceby was a gentleman at large, so that he was able to devote all his time to the exercise of these amiable idiosyncrasies. Not a day passed but what he was fussing about somewhere on the railway turning the directorial eye, like a policeman's lantern, on the proceedings of all the engine drivers, firemen, guards, ticket inspectors, porters and booking clerks who had the misfortune to encounter him.

How he came the Almighty Jupiter over these poor men. How he hectored—how he admonished them! The engine driver might have been driving for twenty years, but he was no match at the business for Joshua Bounceby. The fireman might have been stoking all his life, but he was a fool at the operation by comparison with J. B. The ticket inspector might have been ticket-inspecting ever since the line was opened, but he was a mere babe at the game when pitted against this omniscient amateur.

"Look here! That's not the way. This is the way—d'ye hear, feller?"

And the "feller," who probably had a wife and children, or, at any rate, his own bread and butter to consider, would touch his cap with outward respect, but with inward derision, wrath and loathing. Did not Joshua Bounceby richly merit these sentiments from all who knew him?

But the individual who, for his sins, came for a larger share of our director's unwelcome attentions than any other man in the company's service was Chief Detective Wiggins. Chief Detective Wiggins was, as his title implies, head of the railway detective staff, whose duties were to keep a sharp lookout for persons traveling without tickets, or with insufficient tickets, or with tickets for a class inferior to that which they condescended to patronize, or otherwise defrauding the London and Suburban Railway Company.

A smart man was this Wiggins, as shrewd and cute as they make 'em, with more nous in his little finger than Joshua carried under the whole of his 7⅛ top hat. Yet our director's attitude toward the chief detective was that of a pedagogue toward an unusually dense scholar, and he was forever lecturing him on the lax and unintelligent manner in which he performed his duties.

"It's my belief that you let hundreds of those swindling fellers slip through your fingers every week," said Joshua Bounceby to the chief of the detective staff, lecturing him, one day, on the Lavender Hill station.

"Well, there are some get through, no doubt, sir," assented the official, with humility. "But considering how few of us there are compared with the number of passengers, I'm afraid that it is inevitable."

"Umph! There are plenty of you to do the work if it was done properly," asserted Mr. Bounceby, in his knock-you-down way. "It's not the quantity of the material that's at fault; it's the quality, my fine feller."

"For one thing, sir," said Chief Detective Wiggins, deprecatingly, "the old hands get to know us so well——. Ah! You see these two chaps," he added, indicating a couple of workmen with carpenter's baskets over their shoulders who happened to pass them at that moment.

"Now, I have reason to believe, sir, that they do the company out of three or four shillings every week, traveling between this and Hoxton Rise. Yet they're so artful, that hanged if we've ever been able to catch 'em, although we've set traps for them time after time. I've tried getting into the same compartment with 'em to see if they wouldn't give some of their little tricks away in conversation. But they know me, and they won't talk, except about the weather, when I'm by. It's the same with our chaps. They spot 'em at once. Now, if only some gentleman, whom they would never suspect, were to get in with 'em and listen to 'em talking, when they are off their guard, I believe he'd pick up a bit of uncommonly useful information, sir, which might lead to the conviction of a good many workmen, who, at present, make a systematic practice of 'doing' the company."

"Ah!" said Joshua Bounceby. "That is your opinion, is it?"

"It is my confident opinion, sir," replied Chief Detective Wiggins.

"But I don't see what dodges they can have that you shouldn't be able to find out without the least difficulty," answered the director, superciliously. "If it is a matter of traveling without ticket, surely it is easy enough to catch 'em at that?"

Detective Wiggins smiled the smile of the man who knows.

"You see, sir," he explained, "sometimes they'll start from here, sometimes from Wandsworth Broadway, sometimes from Tooting Road, sometimes from Streatham Park; so that we never know where to be watching for 'em. And they'll come running down the stairs, with a dozen other workmen, at the last minute, and so they get through the gate before the collector can stop 'em. Then if you put one of the traveling inspectors on to 'em, it's odds that on that particular occasion they'll happen to have taken a ticket. And if not, well, they just say that they had no time to book, and offer the fare to the next station, where they get out, as innocent as lambs—and——"

"But why does the inspector take the fare?" interrupted Mr. Bounceby, with contempt. "He ought to make them give their names and addresses, and report them for prosecution."

"If he did, sir—there being no evidence of intent to defraud—the magistrate would never convict, you see; and so we simply look foolish, and the company is saddled with the costs. Magistrates always side with the workingman against a railway company, sir, unless the evidence is quite pat. That's the worst of it. * * * Ah! There are those two chaps getting into the up-train now. If it was any use and they didn't know me so well, I'd take a ride with 'em and see if I couldn't bowl them out. But as it is——"

"Damme! I'll take a ride with the fellers," announced Mr. Bounceby, with sudden, pompous resolution.

And he hurried off in the direction of the third-class smoker which the two workmen had entered, and jumped into it just as the train was moving out of the station.

He sat down, lighted a cigarette, and began to read his evening paper, appearing to be quite absorbed in its contents. The two workmen glanced at him, and proceeded to converse together without paying any further heed to him.

Their conversation, at the outset, contained nothing worthy of remark, referring merely to some general topics of the day and the prospects for a forthcoming race at Kempton Park. Presently, however, to the great delight and triumph of Mr. Bounceby, it veered round to that particular subject of all others on which he desired to hear them discourse.

"I sy, mite," observed one of the two, expectorating on to the floor and settling his hob-nailed boot upon the expectoration, as is the pleasant little habit of the British workman, "see owld Wig on the platform at Lavender 'ill, eh?"

"Yuss!" rejoined the other, with a grin. "And he didn't clap his bloomin' eyes on to us—ow now! Not at orl, did 'e, mite?"

His companion laughed.

"One hasn't no need to be a bloomin' thort-reader to see how he suspeck us," he said.

"Aye," was the chuckling rejoinder, "'T my suspeck; but 'e yn't never gowin' to cop us. You and me wosn't riz yesterday, nor the dy afore. What 'o, mite?"

"Thort 'e wos gowin' to get in along wiv us. But I s'pose 'e sor it was now gow—us knowin' 'im so well. Shouldn't wonder, though, if 'e wasn't somewhere in the trine, a-follerin' of us, should you, Dick?"

"No, I shouldn't. Wot's more, I rather 'ope 'e is, us 'appenin' to 'ave pisteboards, O. K., for this occasion only—eh, Bill?"

"Yuss. If ownly 'e'd pull us up at the barrier at Hoxton Rise. Snikes! Wouldn't I jest purtend as I'd lorst my ticket, and fumble in orl me pockets, and look in the linin' of my 'at, and then, jest as 'e wos a-gowin' to run us in, suddenly find as I'd got it in my 'and orl the while? That would be prime, wouldn't it?"

"Yer rite, mite. Or let 'im run yer in afore yer fahnd yer ticket, and then bring a haction agin 'im for forise imprisonment. Guess that'd mike him a bit sick, eh?"

The other nodded and chuckled.

"I only wish as 'e might give me the charnst," he observed. "Serve him bloomin' well rite, it would, the spyin' old fox."

"Yuss. And it yn't as if we wos by any means the wust offenders," answered his companion, in an ill-used tone. "We does py our fares, on an averidge, three dys a week, doesn't we? While there's Jim Stickings a traveled from North Croydon to Battersea Bridge and back every blessed dy for this free mont's parst, and never pide the company a solitary copper."

"Ah, Jim's is a 'cute 'un, 'e is," said the other, grinning appreciatively. "That is a rippin' dodge as he've bit on for travelin' gratis. Never heer nuthink to beat it. Jim's patent, I orlwys corls it, which 'e deserve a gowld medal for 'avin' ever thort of anythink so bloomin' sly. Wot do you think, mite?"

"Ow! Its a fair masterpiece," was the emphatic rejoinder. "Not but wot there's risks abaht it, if yer arsks me. And sooner or liter, Jim 'e 'll get cort. Yer mark my words."

"Well, if 'e does get cort, it'll take a sharper bloke than old Wig to catch 'im," said his companion.

"Dunno. The biggest flats sometimes blunders upon a smart cop," observed the other, sententiously, as he knocked the ashes out of his short clay pipe and then proceeded to refill it, slowly, with shag from a screw of dirty green paper.

"Ah! That's right enough," admitted the other, lending emphasis to his assent by a particularly copious expectoration.

Then both men relapsed into silence.

Now to the whole of the above dialogue Mr. Bounceby had listened—though appearing to be buried in his paper—with pricked ears and alert attention. And his disappointment when the two workmen ceased their conversation just at the critical point, without having divulged the secret of Jim Stickings' dodge for traveling gratis from North Croydon to Battersea Bridge, was keen and poignant. If only he could find that out and then catch Jim Stickings in the act! What a feather in his own cap! And what a one in the eye for that self-opinionated fool, Detective Wiggins! Why couldn't those two fellows continue their conversation! Perhaps they would if he waited a little. He did wait. But the workmen still remained silent. In fact, one of them showed evident signs of nodding off to sleep. He must find out, though. It would be too mortifying to have been just on the verge of an important discovery, and then, after all, to miss it. He would engage these two workmen in conversation. He would worm the secret out of them; or, failing that, he would draw it from them with silver cords. Half a crown went a long way with a laboring man, while for five shillings you could get him to do almost anything. However, he would not begin by offering them a bribe, since that might arouse their suspicion. He would rather address them in the friendly and affable guise of an innocently inquisitive fellow passenger.

So, laying down his paper, and smiling upon the two workmen very blandly through his gold-rimmed glasses, he cleared his throat and said:

"Ahem!—excuse me, my good fellers; but I couldn't help overhearing that very interesting subject of which you were talking just now, and—ahem!—do you know, you rather aroused my curiosity."

He looked from one to the other, smiling pleasantly as he spoke. They met his smiles with stolid and perhaps rather suspicious stares.

"You will pardon me—no offense, I hope," he went on, with increasing affability—"but—well, upon my word, you know, I'm a curious old fellow, and really I should be awfully interested to know how that friend of yours manages to travel from North Croydon to Battersea bridge every day without paying his fare."

"I dare say yer would, guv'ner," replied one of the men gruffly.

"It must be a dodge worth knowing," smiled Mr. Bounceby, with insinuating blandness.

"Yer right there, guv'ner," said the other man. "Too well worf knowin' ter give away, and that's a fack."

"It might even be worth buying—eh?" replied Mr. Bounceby, with sly suggestiveness, accidentally, as it were, chinking some loose silver in his breeches' pocket.

"It might," grunted the man addressed, laconically. "And it mightn't. What der yer sy, mite?" he added, turning to his companion.

"It orl depen's," answered the "mite," "on what reasons the gentleman have for wishin' to know it. If, for igzample, it's jest out of innercent cnriosity, I down't sy as I should object to oblige: but if by any charnst—I down't s'pose it is so, I merely sez 'if'—if by any charnst, I repeats, he should happen to be a spy, as means to report us to the company——"

"A spy? My good feller, what can you be thinking of?" exclaimed Mr. Bounceby, affecting mingled amazement and indignation at so preposterous an idea. "Come, do I look like a spy, now?"

"Well, now, guv'ner, to do yer justice, I carn't sy as yer do. If yer arsks me, yer looks rather a mug," answered the workman, candidly. "Still, appearances is orful deceivin', and in this 'ere wicked world a bloke carn't be too careful."

Mr. Bounceby, mindful of his object, swallowed his indignation and laughed boisterously.

"I like your frankness," he said, with pretended approval. "It's—ahem—so nice and natural. I can't bear anything underhand, you know, either in myself or in others. And as for doing anything so low and mean as to worm information, in confidence, from a fellow-passenger and then report him to the company. I give you my word that I would considerably rather shoot myself," added Mr. Bounceby, making his voice quiver with generous indignation at the thought.

"That's gospel, guv'ner? Matthew, Mark, Luke, and orl the rest of 'em?" demanded the workman, gazing steadily at his interlocutor.

"Gospel—'pon my oath," lied Mr. Bounceby.

"In that kise," said the workman, turning to his pal, "I down't know as there'd be any 'arm in our doin' business wiv the gentleman. Eh, Bill?"

"I down't know as there would," answered Bill, a little gleam, perchance of cupidity, lighting up his stolid eyes.

Mr. Bounceby was delighted.

"What shall we say? Five bob?" he queried.

"A dollar's too cheap," replied Bill's "mite," shaking his head. "Why, bless yer, guv'ner, yer've ownly got to use the information proper to sive the oof ten times over in free monfs."

"Ah! But I don't propose to do that," remonstrated Mr. Bounceby. "I merely want to know, out of innocent curiosity."

"Orl the sime," stuck in Bill, "the fack remines as yer could use the information if yer liked. And for my part, I sy as it's dirt cheap at a thin 'un—eh, Dick?"

"Yer right, Bill. It's a gift at that," assented Bill, with an emphatic nod.

"Come! Ten shillings is a goodish bit of money," expostulated Mr. Bounceby, who (as vulgarians say) always "parted" rather hard.

"Orl right, guv'ner. We yn't keen, if you yn't. In fack, I down't know as we has any right to give Jim Stickings awy to a puffick strynger, after orl. Hilloa! Here we are at Hoxton Rise. Well, good dy, guv'ner."

And the two workmen rose to leave the carriage.

"I'll give you the half-sovereign if you'll tell me, my good man," exclaimed Mr. Bounceby, desperately.

Dick alighted on to the platform. Bill remained, hesitating a moment, upon the step.

"Come!" cried Mr. Bounceby, with excitement—for the guard was already waving his green flag—"just tell me that dodge for traveling without a ticket from North Croydon to Battersea Bridge, and this ten bob is yours."

Bill faced round and held out his hand.

"Swear you won't give the gime awy," he demanded, anxiously.

"I swear," ejaculated Mr. Bounceby.

"Then hand over and I'll tell yer."

Mr. Bounceby laid the half-sovereign in the other's horny palm.

Very solemnly and slowly Bill gave the required information. It was comprised in this one word—

"Walk!"

Then the workmen jumped off the step of the moving train, while Mr. Joshua Bounceby, momentarily paralyzed and almost apoplectic with rage, was carried on to the next station.

* * * * * * *

Those are the facts, precisely as I have related them. And I may add that I have them on the excellent authority of Chief Detective Wiggins (now in the employ of another railway company) himself.

It naturally occurred to me, at the times when he told me the story: How did Chief Detective Wiggins get his information? I asked him the question pointblank. But—possibly, owing to the noise of an engine just then blowing off steam—he didn't appear to have heard what I said. At any rate, he merely made the irrelevant remark that the wind had gone round to the east, and he shouldn't wonder if we didn't get some snow.—London Truth.

THE BIG HOUSE IN THE SQUARE

By JOHN K. LEYS

I SAT in my bath chair at the corner of the square alone, for I had sent my man to dispatch a telegram and it was pleasanter for me to wait in that quiet spot than in the busy thoroughfare. It was a warm day in mid October. The sun shone with soft mellow radiance on the yellow leaves that were clinging to the trees in the garden of the square or fluttering quietly to rest on their parent earth. No passengers were to be seen; but for the dull sound from the far-off streets the silence was profound.

The melancholy of autumn—that season of spent endeavor, of slow decay, of rest—was in the air.

Most of the houses in the square were shut, their owners not yet returned from the country; but one very large house was evidently inhabited. It filled the center of the block facing the square on my right. I was wondering what it could be, for the building seemed too large for a private dwelling house, when my attention was attracted by a young man—a youth, I ought rather to say, for he did not seem to be more than nineteen or twenty—who was slowly pacing along the pavement close to the railings that inclosed the square garden, looking all the time at the large house I have just mentioned. It seemed almost as if he were expecting or hoping to see the face of some one he knew appear at one of the tall windows. And what particularly struck me was that as he walked he touched with his fingers every fourth one of the iron uprights that formed the railing.

I thought he would turn and come back again. I was sure he would. He did, touching the railings as before. And this time he touched the uprights on my side of the tall ones. That meant that he was systematically touching every one of them.

My curiosity, satisfied on this point, immediately reverted to the more important question—what could be the young man's reason for behaving in this extraordinary way?

He came slowly nearer, and just as he was about to turn around, obeying an impulse, I called to him.

He gave a little guilty start, as if aware for the first time that he had been observed, and hesitated as if he had made up his mind to walk away.

"Don't go," I said, and my voice reached him easily in the quiet autumn air. "You see I can't do you any harm. I only want to speak to you for a moment."

He left the railings and came up to my chair, and then I saw that he was really a very nice-looking boy with an open, pleasant face that just now was slightly flushed.

"Would you mind looking down that street," I began by way of breaking the ice, "and telling me if you see a man—a servant out of livery—coming this way?" He stepped aside so as to obtain a view down the side street, and said that no such person was in sight.

"Would you like me to wheel you a little way?" he added.

"No, I think I will stay here. But your kindness in offering to do that encourages me to ask you to do me one small favor."

"Oh, certainly."

"Then will you tell me why you touched every fourth upright in the railings as you passed along just now?"

The young man's cheek flushed with shame and annoyance, and he replied rather sharply; "I can't conceive, sir, how that is any business of yours."

"You are perfectly entitled to make me that answer," said I, with a smile, "and, to tell the truth, I quite expected that you would. But as you see I am an invalid, and being unable to go about as you can, little things are apt to acquire an unnatural importance in my eyes. My curiosity has been roused, and if you can see your way to gratifying it, I should really feel obliged to you. Besides, you know you promised to do me a favor."

"Oh, well," said the youngster in an off-hand way and with a toss of his shoulders that I thought became him vastly, "if you care to know, the fact is I was seeking for a mark on the railings—a signal."

"Yes?"

"You see that big house opposite? It is a girls' school, and one of the young ladies there——"

He stopped and hesitated for a word, blushing furiously.

"With whom you are in love?"

"I suppose you would call it that. She is very ill, and I daren't go to ask how she is. They wouldn't tell me if I did."

"But why?"

"Because she is a ward in chancery, and they have got an injunction——"

"Against you? Upon my word, my young man, you are beginning early."

"Don't make fun of me, please, sir. I can't stand it, and I might say something that would not be respectful and be horribly sorry for it afterward."

"I assure you I am not laughing at you nor thinking of such a thing," said I. And as I looked into the lad's ingenuous face I wished I could have had such a boy to call me father. "But I don't understand yet about the signal," I added.

"It was Carrie Embleton, one of the little girls, who promised that if Winnie was better she would make a sticky smear on one of the railings, but I haven't been able to find it. And I am afraid she will not get better; she may die, and I shall never see her again."

"How would it do if I were to go to the house and ask for her?"

"Oh, sir, if you would! And do you think I might go with you?"

I pondered for a moment, and just then Jenkins, my man, came around the corner of the street. That gave me an idea.

"Suppose you take my man's place and wheel me up to the house?" I said "Then you will have to help me up the steps, for I can't walk for myself, and I can make the excuse that I want to have you within call to bring you into the sitting room. If you are not afraid of being recognized that might do."

"I don't think Mrs. Melrose would recognize me coming as your servant, and if she did it wouldn't much matter; she could only turn me out." As he spoke he laid his hand on the long handles of the chair.

I dispatched Jenkins on another errand, and the young man wheeled me up to the big house. On the way I asked his name and he told me it was Edward Hetherington.

We were admitted without any difficulty, and as we waited for the mistress of the house to appear my companion whispered to me something rather important, which I had quite forgotten. The young lady's name, he said, was Winifred Gordon, and she had neither father nor mother.

Mrs. Melrose swept into the room, a well-developed specimen of her class, and came up to me when she perceived my helpless condition. Hetherington stood modestly near the door.

"I called to inquire," I said, "after the health of one of your pupils in whom I am interested—a Miss Gordon. I was told that she was seriously ill."

"She was, but I am glad to say that she is better. She is to come downstairs today for the first time since her illness."

"I am sincerely glad to hear it," said I. "May I ask you the nature of her illness?"

"Oh, nothing infectious, I assure you. A sort of low fever. The foolish child fancied herself in love with a very presumptuous young man. Perhaps you may know the circumstances?"

I said I knew something of them.

"Well, she was so silly as to allow that to upset her considerably. And this news about her uncle has, of course, retarded her recovery."

"Her uncle?"

"Yes. Have you not heard? It is really the most scandalous thing. Mr. Gordon was believed to be one of the wealthiest men in Bombay. He was very indignant when he heard of the love affair I alluded to and immediately told his solicitor to settle £100 for him on Winnie so that he might make her a ward of chancery and be able to get an injunction against the young man—I forget his name."

"Hetherington?"

"Yes, of course, that is it. Well, now it turns out that the man's wealth was all sham and pretense. He has been practically a bankrupt for years, and I may think myself lucky that I was paid my last term's bill. Of course, I shall get nothing for this term, but fortunately, it has just commenced."

"Then you mean that Winnie must go out to India?"

"That would be a wild-goose chase," said the schoolmistress with a little scornful laugh. "No one knows precisely what has become of Mr. Gordon—at least, I have not been able to learn anything of his whereabouts, and I fancy more than one of his creditors would give a good round sum to get his address."

"Then what is to become of Winnie?"

"That is just what I should so very much like to know. I hoped when the servant told me you had come to inquire for her, that you might have something to propose—something in the nature of a home to offer her."

I shook my head.

"Then what is to become of the poor child I cannot imagine. She is too young to earn her own living—much too young. I cannot send her to the workhouse, and yet I cannot be expected to keep her here for nothing."

"No one surely would be so unreasonable as to expect that you would voluntarily do a thing of that kind," I exclaimed, and the lady looked at me very sharply to see whether I was speaking ironically before she replied, "I must try to get her into some orphanage, but I fear it will be very difficult.

As she said these words the door opened and a girl of about sixteen came shyly into the room. She was not strikingly pretty, but her expression was gentle and sweet and she was pale as from a recent illness.

I beckoned her to come to me, and without noticing the young man who stood hat in hand behind the door she came close to my chair wondering, no doubt, who I was and what I wanted with her.

Mrs. Melrose considerately left us to ourselves, and my temporary servant drew a few steps nearer as soon as the door had closed behind her.

"My dear," I said, taking her by the hand, "there is some one here who is very anxious to see you."

She followed the direction of my eyes and then with a little scream her hands went up to her breast. And the next I knew was that they were in each other's arms.

I had forgotten all about the chancery division of the high court of justice and its ridiculous injunction, but it was scarcely worth remembering, now when there was no one who cared to enforce it. Perhaps if I had had the use of my limbs I might have thought it necessary to go out of the room or at least to turn my back. As it was, I might have shut my eyes, but this did not occur to me. It was most touching and beautiful to watch the innocent raptures of the two young lovers. There was no time for words, and it was plain that they had a better language than any verbal one. A broken sentence now and then was all they seemed to need. The lad's face was radiant, his eyes burning, his whole frame quivering with excitement, and as for Winnie, she seemed to be literally drinking in great draughts of happiness.

As I looked I made up my mind.

"Hetherington, my boy," said I, "be good enough to retire for a few moments to the other end of the room or outside the door, whichever you prefer. Winnie, come here."

She came close up to me, and I said, "Give me your hand."

She put her slender little hand in mine.

"I know your story, my child," said I, "but you do not even know my name. As you see, I am an old man, at least compared to you, and a cripple. I have an aunt who keeps house for me. Would you like to make your home with me, Winnie? It may not be very long, for I can see that the day is not far off when you will want to fly away to a little nest of your own. But till that time comes will you let me be your father? I know just how you are feeling about Ned there, but you know marriage is a serious thing, and there ought to be some one to see to things for you. Will you let me be that some one?"

Her bonny eyes opened wider with surprise and then a pleased look came into them. Finally she bent down, rested her arm on my shoulder, and lightly kissed me on the cheek.

FOOLING SOLOMON: A VILLAGE COMEDY

ACT I.

"EUPHEMIA, some one's rapping at the street door. You go 'round to the side gate and peep. There's a dear."

Euphemia raised her sun-bonneted head from the rose bush she was pruning and listened. Sure enough the dry metallic "clack" of the knocker could be heard through the drowsy summer air. Euphemia came back quickly from her scrutiny at the side gate and brandished her garden shears dramatically.

"Sister Felicia, it's that Luke Solomon!"

"Guess he's come to see us about the money he owed father." Sister Felicia put down her pan of half-shelled peas.

"Euphemia, you're never to bring Snippens into the parlor!"

"Now, Sister Felicia," said Euphemia, nodding darkly, "you don't know that Luke Solomon. Why, he might try to murder one of us!" and she hugged Snippens' black and tan body close in her arms while the dog grumbled comfortably like a little wash-boiler.

A moment later the three opened the old-fashioned street door and ushered their visitor into the quaintest of miniature parlors. The visitor's name gave one the impression that he sprung from the famous seven tribes, and his prominent nose, red hair and blue eyes rendered it a positive certainty. He spoke through his nose.

"Bording, Biss Flishi. Hobe I see you both well." Mr. Luke Solomon seated himself heavily in a tiny gilt chair. "I cabe to see you aboud that boney of your father's. Have you god by node of hand for the one hundred dollars?"

"Why, no," said Sister Felicia, quickly, "and you know it. The day before he died—this is Saturday—it was Monday father said he'd loaned you a hundred dollars a year ago. You told him at the time that between men who know one another a note wasn't necessary. All we have is the entry in his diary."

"Hum," commented Mr. Luke Solomon, as he squinted reflectively at a tall what-not which was evidently in his confidence. "You can'd expect me to pay you, thed, Biss Felishi. The law wound'd supord dead people's diaries, you do."

"Luke Solomon, you mean you'll not pay this honest debt, when we need the money so, too?" flared up Euphemia.

"Do, I won'd." At each word he thumped the little folding table till the flowers primped against their vase.

"Bud I'll give you twenty-five dolars for a receipt and that page outer Bister Chinkerble's diary. I can'd do ady fairer than that. Cub, dow, Biss Flishi, as betweed Christiads."

Sister Felicia cocked up her Presbyterian nose at him. "No, sir, you pay us what you owe us. Our nephew's coming here from Boston today. He'll have the law on you."

"Well," said Mr. Solomon, shaking an omnious forefinger, "I've dud by dudy. Go get your old nevy." Leaving the two prim old ladies petrified with horror at this veiled threat he crammed his greasy beaver on his red head and stamped out.

ACT II.

"Ady thing I can do for you today, sir," queried Mr. Luke Solomon, as he grinned at a prospective purchaser and exuded politeness from every pore. A tall, slow-moving young chap with a pompadour expressive of continual astonishment was looking over Mr. Solomon's goods, displayed in tempting array. The front of the little second-hand shop looked like a rare specimen of earth strata. There was a ground layer of trunks and heavy furniture, another of rifles, banjos and satchels, and quite a gallows-tree of worn suits, topped by hats, bird cages and the smaller fry of Mr. Solomon's stock in trade.

"I want to get a present for an aunt of mine. Something in the way of a chest of drawers."

"I'e got just the thing you wand. Step righd back here," said Mr. Solomon lead the way through an alley of musty clothes. "There it is," pointing to a little oak press about four feet high, with a number of small and large drawers and a bit of mirror on top.

"Looks prety old but I guess it's solid," said the customer shaking it. "How much?"

"Six dollars and a quarter—giving it away."

"Done. Send it up to this address. I suppose the six and a quarter includes the chest and everything about it. You know fortunes have been found in things of the kind before now," and the young man smiled expressively.

"Ho, I'll rud the risk of thad, sir," said Mr. Luke Solomon, as he wrote down with visible surprise the address of the Misses Chinkerble, "though thad's nod saying this here ain't a capital place to find a fortune id. I bought it up at old Silas Blodgett's. He was a regular righd dowd biser, he was. People thoughd he had thousands ad thousands but he was id ded whed he died. Adything else, sir?"

"No." The young man left.

"Six and a quarter for that old chest of Blodgett's that cost be a dollar. Ho. that nevy's a regular righd dowd easy one, he is," and Luke Solomon sniggered after the departing figure.

Late that night a bewhiskered sailor strode into the shop as Mr. Solomon was meditating over a glass of rum and a strong pipe.

"Hullo, matey," he cried in a round voice, as he clapped Mr. Solomon on the back. "You're Luke Solomon, eh?"

"Yes," said the owner of that name. "They tell me at the tavern that you bought up all Si Blodgett's furniture at the sale. Where is it?"

Mr. Solomon pointed out the various articles as he enumerated them—"Bedstead, three chairs, two deal tables, one chest drawers"—

"Where's the chest? I only wanted that anyhow," said the sailor, who had listened with manifest impattence to this catalogue.

"Sold this bording."

"Who to? I'd give ten dollars to know."

"Ho, thad's by affair. Dow what do you want with that chest ady way?" Mr. Luke Solomon eyed him shrewdly, like a bunty English sparrow, and bethought himself of the nephew's half-laughing question that morning.

"Don't question me, don't trifle with me, matey," roared the sailor. "It isn't safe. Here's twenty dollars; now where is that chest?"

"Do. Tell me what you want with it first."

"Well," he growled, "I'll do the square thing by you; but mind, you do the same for me. Did you ever hear of Si Blodgett having a son? No? Well, he did. I guess I could sign myself 'Si Blodgett, junior,' if I cared to. But I don't. It might not be healthy for me to be seen in these parts if I did. You see, the old gent failed in business and then the creditors nearly sunk him he took all his money—a thousand dollars, and put it in a secret drawer in this same old chest."

"Ad I sold it for six and a quarter. Holy Boses."

"Ha. Well, the old man never would touch the money—he was a bit near for a fact. He wanted to save it up for me. He loved me so, Solomon, he did," and the sailor roughly dashed a tear from his eye with a convenient sleeve. "I heard he was ailing but I couldn't hurry the ship and I darn't write to any one in the villiage, so I had to wait till I could come myself. Now you've sold the press. Well, go buy it back. Pay anything they ask, and I'll divy up with you, mate, fair and square. The bottom drawer has a false bottom and the money's there. I've got the little key slung around my neck. Come, is it a bargain?"

With many tears and protestations that it was a bargain Mr. Solomon ushered his customer out and began to close his shop.

ACT III.

Next morning at 7 Mr. Luke Solomon hurried up the single village street to the Misses Chinkerble's house on the hill. As he let the knocker fall the noise of sturdy hammering came from within and turned his heart to water. The nephew in his shirt sleeves opened the door.

"Good bording, sir. I just cabe aroud to see if you would let be get that press back. I'll give you adother for it and a better wud."

"No," said the nephew, "no; it just suits my aunt."

"I'll give you twenty-five dollars for it! You see I wand to complete a sed."

"No, sir. It's old, I know, and the bottom drawer don't just fit—I'm fixing it snugger now—but I can't part with it."

"Make it fifty," said Mr. Solomon, in an agony of appeal as the hard-headed nephew nodded his refusal.

"Do you bead to tell me you wond take sevendy-five?"

"Look here, Mr. Solomon: What do you want to give seventy-five dollars for an old piece of furniture like that?" His hair became spiky in astonishment. "I believe there's something behind all this."

"Do. Do. Do. Upod my word. I odly wand to complete a sed."

"Well, it must be a precious fine set that's all I have got to say. But if you want this chest it will cost you a hundred and ten dollars—just."

"Agreed," said Mr. Solomon. The nephew lugged it to the side gate and transferred it to its former owner. Mr. Solomon produced an old red wallet with a rubber band around it and counted out the sum.

Ten minutes later he had his treasure in the office of his little second-hand shop, tearing at its vitals.

"There's do little key swung round by deck but I'll get the boney all the sabe. Thed, be and the sailor'll look for it together," and he laughed to himself.

The bottom drawer came out easily. There was a slip of paper fastened to the bottom—the false bottom. Mr. Luke Solomon read it. It said:

"Received of Mr. Luke Solomon the sum of one hundred dollars ($100.00) with interest for one year at six per cent, being payment in full for his indebtedness to the Misses Chinkerble.

"Robert Chinkerble,
"The Nevvy."

* * * * * * * * *

Up at the Misses Chinkerble's house the nephew and his two aunts were laughing and crying and kising one another.

"Sister Felicia," said Euphemia, between whiles, "I think Rob looked almost handsome as his father in Brother Bob's sailor clothes."

"Almost," said Sister Felicia, smiling at him—"but he's got a better head for business than his father had."

And then they laughed the harder.